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Information security: sensitive personal information in the workplace

In the course of their normal job duties, some Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) employees have access to other people's sensitive personally identifiable information (SPI). Information security is taken seriously at TDCJ and agency employees are responsible for maintaining the security and confidentiality of this information.

Sensitive personal information is protected by several state and federal laws and TDCJ is responsible for protecting the personal information of both staff and offenders. Agency employees are responsible for protecting any SPI with which they come into contact as a result of their job duties. An information security breach could harm the information's owner and result in identity theft and anyone who releases or fails to protect SPI could face disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Privacy and security breaches may also lead to civil and criminal penalties under federal and state law.

There are many kinds of SPI, to include but not limited to Social Security numbers; driver license numbers; birth dates; criminal



records, including Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) data; and biometric data such as fingerprints. The primary focus of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is to protect health information, another kind of SPI, which includes documents such as health care provider statements, prescription information and medical records of employees and offenders.

There are a few simple steps you can take to keep information in your office and on your work computer secure. Never write down passwords because it is common to look for a note under a keyboard or in a desk drawer. Do not share your username or password with anyone; if a breach occurs, the logged-in individual is responsible. Lock or log off your computer when you are absent. Make sure paper documents with SPI are disposed of according to the agency's record retention schedule, and take steps to ensure SPI is secure during work and after hours; appropriate precautions include locking office doors and file cabinets.

To learn more about SPI and information security, ask your supervisor, a Human Resources representative or the Information Security Department. ●